

Ask Away – March 19

1) **The NASB of Deuteronomy 19:3 says “prepare the roads” while the ESV says “measure the distances.” Which is it? (Deut 19:3 NASB; Deut 19:3 ESV)**

The difficult Hebrew phrase *tākîn l'kā hadderek* has been understood as building or preparing roads (NASB, NET, NKJV, NIV) or measuring the distance of roads (ESV, NRSV). “Although both meanings highlight the need to provide easy access to these cities, the latter option appears preferable. Since this verse emphasizes the equitable distribution of these cities throughout the land and v. 6 refers to the danger of great distance, the idea of carefully measuring the distance between the cities seems to fit the context best.”¹

2) **Why does God tell the Israelites not to move their “neighbor’s landmark, which the men of old have set”? (Deut 19:14)**

The national boundaries of Israel were determined by God (Num 34:1–10; cf. Gen 15:18–21; Exod 23:31), and the land within Israel was divided by lot and granted in proportion to tribal population (Num 26:52–56; Josh 13–19). Although not explicitly stated, it is likely that each tribe followed this example and divided their land by lot and granted parcels in proportion to the size of a clan or family (cf. Josh 21 where the Levites were given land by family; also Prov 23:10 where an ancient boundary stone marked off a family field). Since the lot reflected God’s will in decision making (Prov 16:33; Josh 7:14; 1 Sam 10:17–24; cf. Prov 18:18), the land within Israel belonged to each family as a personal grant from God Himself. Thus moving a boundary stone was a violation of God’s gift, an affront to the sanctity of His decision, and the theft of another person’s private property (cf. Hos 5:10; Isa 5:8; Micah 2:2–4). Indeed, it was so serious an offense that it was singled out in the curses: “Cursed be anyone who moves his neighbor’s landmark” (Deut 27:17).

Could one family sell their land to another family? While the land could be sold in cases of poverty (Lev 25:25), it could not be sold in perpetuity, for it belonged to God (Lev 25:23–24). Further, the land could always be redeemed, and if it was not, it was released back to the original owner in the year of Jubilee (Lev 25:26–28).

Could one tribe sell their land to another tribe? No, God forbade this practice: “The inheritance of the people of Israel shall not be transferred from one tribe to another, for every one of the people of Israel shall hold on to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. And every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the people of Israel shall be wife to one of the clan of the tribe of her father, so that every one of the people of Israel may possess the inheritance of his fathers. So no inheritance shall be transferred from one tribe to another, for each of the tribes of the people of Israel shall hold on to its own inheritance” (Num 36:7–9). Many commentators think this command was what motivated Naboth, who was likely from the tribe of Issachar, to

¹ Michael A. Grisanti, “Deuteronomy” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, *Numbers to Ruth*. Rev. ed., edited by Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012) p. 657 n. 3. See also Paul E. Dion, “Deuteronomy 19:3: Prepare the Way, or Estimate the Distance?” *Église et théologie* 25.3 (1994): 333–41.

refuse to sell his land to king Ahab, who was from the tribe of Manasseh (1 Kings 21:1-4).